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SERMON

Preached before the
Incorporated SOCIETY
FOR THE
Propagation of the Gospel in
Foreign Parts;

AT THEIR
ANNIVERSARY MEETING
IN THE
Parish-Church of St Mary-le-Bow,

On FRIDAY, *February* 18. 1731.

By **GEORGE BERKELEY**, D. D.
Dean of *Londonderry.*

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L O N D O N: 

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February 18. 173^d.

*At the Anniversary Meeting of the
Society for the Propagation of the
Gospel in Foreign Parts.*

A Greed, That the Thanks of
the SOCIETY be given to the
Reverend Mr. Dean *Berkeley*, for his
Sermon Preached this Day before the
SOCIETY, and that He be desired
to Print the same.

David Humphreys, Secretary.



JOHN XVII. V. 3.

*This is Life Eternal, that they may
know Thee the only true God, and
Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*

THAT human Kind were not
designed merely to sojourn a
few Days upon this Earth: that
a Being of such Excellence as
the Soul of Man, so capable of a nobler
Life, and having such a high Sense of
Things moral and intellectual, was not crea-
ted in the sole View of being imprisoned in
an earthly Tabernacle, and partaking a few
Pains and Pleasures which chequer this mor-
tal Life, without aspiring to any thing ei-
ther above or beyond it, is a Fundamental
Doctrine as well of Natural Religion as of
the Christian. It comes at once recom-

mended by the Authority of Philosophers and Evangelists. And that there actually is in the Mind of Man a strong instinct and desire, an appetite and tendency towards another and a better State, incomparably superior to the present, both in point of Happiness and Duration, is no more than every one's Experience and inward Feeling may inform him. The satiety and disrelish attending sensual Enjoyments, the relish for things of a more pure and spiritual Kind, the restless Motion of the Mind, from one terrene Object or pursuit to another, and often a Flight or Endeavour above them all towards something unknown, and perfective of its Nature, are so many signs and tokens of this better State, which in the Style of the Gospel is termed Life Eternal.

AND as this is the greatest Good that can befall us, the very end of our Being, and that alone which can crown and satisfy our Wishes, and without which we shall be ever restless and uneasy; so every Man, who knows and acts up to his true Interest, must make it his principal Care and Study to obtain it: And in order to this, he must endeavour to live suitably to his Calling, and of consequence endeavour to
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make others obtain it too. For how can a Christian shew himself worthy of his Calling, otherwise than by performing the Duties of it? And what Christian Duty is more essentially so, than that of Charity? And what Object can be found upon Earth more deserving our Charity, than the Souls of Men? Or, how is it possible for the most beneficent Spirit to do them better Service, than by promoting their best and most lasting Interest, that is, by putting them in the Way that leads to Eternal Life.

WHAT this Eternal Life was, or how to come at it, were Points unknown to the Heathen World. It must be owned, the wise Men of Old, who followed the Light of Nature, saw even by that Light, that the Soul of Man was debased, and born downwards, contrary to its natural Bent, by carnal and terrene Objects; and that, on the other hand, it was exalted, purged, and in some sort assimilated to the Deity, by the Contemplation of Truth and Practice of Virtue. Thus much in general they saw or surmised. But then about the Way and Means to know the one, or perform the other, they were much at a loss. They were not agreed concerning the true End
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of Mankind; which, as they saw, was mistaken in the vulgar Pursuits of Men; so they found it much more easy to confute the Errors of others, than to ascertain the Truth themselves. Hence so many Divisions and Disputes about a Point which it most imported them to know, insomuch as it was to give the Bias to human Life, and govern the whole Tenor of their Actions and Conduct.

BUT when Life and Immortality were brought to Light by the Gospel, there could remain no Dispute about the chief End and Felicity of Man, no more than there could about the Means of obtaining it, after the express Declaration of our Blessed Lord in the Words of my Text; *This is Life eternal, that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.* For the right understanding of which Words we must observe, that by the Knowledge of God, is not meant a barren Speculation, either of Philosophers or Scholastic Divines, nor any notional Tenets fitted to produce Disputes and Dissentions among Men; but, on the contrary, an holy practical Knowledge, which is the Source, the Root, or Principle of Peace and Union, of Faith, Hope, Charity, and universal Obedience.

A Man may frame the most accurate Notions, and in one Sense attain the exactest Knowledge of God and Christ that human Faculties can reach, and yet, notwithstanding all this, be far from knowing them in that saving Sense. For St. *John* tells us, that *whosoever sinneth, hath not seen Christ, nor known him.* And again, *He that loveth not, knoweth not God.* To know God as we ought, we must love him; and love him so as withal to love our Brethren, his Creatures, and his Children. I say, that Knowledge of God and Christ, which is Life eternal, implies universal Charity, with all the Duties ingrafted thereon, or ensuing from thence, that is to say, the Love of God and Man. And our Lord expressly saith, *He that hath my Commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.* From all which it is evident, that this saving Knowledge of God is inseparable from the Knowledge and Practice of his Will; the explicit Declaration whereof, and of the Means to perform it, are contained in the Gospel, that divine Instrument of Grace and Mercy to the Sons of Men. The metaphysical Knowledge of God, considered in his absolute Nature or Essence, is one thing, and to know him as he

he stands related to us as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, is another. The former kind of Knowledge (whatever it amounts to) hath been, and may be, in Gentiles as well as Christians, but not the latter, which is Life eternal.

FROM what hath been said, it is a plain Consequence, that whoever is a sincere Christian, cannot be indifferent about bringing over other Men to the Knowledge of God and Christ; but that every one of us, who hath any Claim to that Title, is indispensably obliged in Duty to God, and in Charity to his Neighbour, to desire and promote, so far as there is Opportunity, the Conversion of Heathen and Infidels, that so they may become Partakers of Life and Immortality. For, *this is Life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*

IN my present Discourse upon which Words; I shall,

First, CONSIDER in general, the Obligation that Christians lie under, of bringing other Men to the Knowledge of the only true God, and of Jesus Christ. And,

Secondly,

Secondly, I shall consider it in Reference to this laudable Society, instituted for the Propagation of the Gospel. And under each Head, I propose to obviate such Difficulties as may seem to retard, and intermix such Remarks as shall appear proper to forward so good a Work.

Now although it be very evident, that we can really have neither a just Zeal for the Glory of God, nor a beneficent Love of Man, without wishing and endeavouring, as occasion serves, to spread the glad Tidings of Salvation, and bring those who are benighted in the Shadow of Death, to Life eternal, by the Knowledge of the only true God, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. Yet this Duty, plain and undoubted as it seems, happens to be too often overlooked, even by those, whose Attention to other Points would make one think their Neglect of this, not an Effect of lukewarm Indifference, so much as of certain mistaken Notions and Suppositions. Two principal Considerations occur, which, in this particular, seem to have slackened

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the Industry of some, otherwise zealous and serious Christians.

ONE I apprehend to be this, that it is surmised, the Christian Religion is in a declining State, which by many Symptoms seems likely to end either in Popery, or a general Infidelity. And that of Course a prudent Person has nothing to do, but to make sure of his own Salvation, and to acquiesce in the general Tendency of things, without being at any fruitless Pains to oppose what cannot be prevented, to steer against the Stream, or resist a Torrent, which as it flows, gathers Strength and Rapidity, and in the End, will be sure to overflow, and carry all before it. When a Man of a desponding and foreboding Spirit hath been led, by his Observation of the Ways of the World, and the prevailing Humour of our Times, to think after this manner; he will be inclined to strengthen this his preconceived Opinion, as is usual in other the like Cases, by Misapplication of holy Scripture: For instance, by those Words of our Blessed Saviour, *When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find Faith upon Earth?* which have been applied to this very purpose, as importing that before the final Judgment,

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Luke
xviii. 8.

Christian Faith should be extinguished upon Earth; Although these Words do, from the Context, seem plainly to refer to the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, and the obstinate Blindness of the Jews, who even then when they felt the Hand of God, should not acknowledge it, or believe the *Roman* Army to be the Instrument of Divine Vengeance, in the Day of their Visitation, by him whom they had injuriously treated, rejected, and put to Death.

BUT, granting the former Sense might be supported by no absurd Hypothesis, or no improbable Guess; yet shall the Endeavours of Christian Men for propagating the Gospel of Christ be forestalled by any Suppositions or Conjectures whatsoever? admitting, I say, those Words regard the future Advent of Jesus Christ, yet can any one tell how near or how far off that Advent may be? Are not the Times and Seasons foreknown only to God? And shall we neglect a certain Duty to Day, upon an uncertain Surmise of what is to come hereafter? This way of thinking might furnish as strong Reasons against Preaching at home, as abroad, within, as without the Pale of the Church. It would be as specious an Argument against the one as the o-

ther, but in reality can conclude against neither. For, as we know not when that supposed Time of general Infidelity is to be, or whether it will be at all; so, if it were ever so sure, and ever so near, it would nevertheless become us to take Care, that it may not be an Effect of our own particular Indifference and Neglect.

BUT if we take our Notions, not from the uncertain Interpretation of a particular Text, but from the whole Tenor of the divine Oracles, from the express Promise and reiterated Predictions of our Blessed Lord, and his Apostles, we shall believe, that

Phil. ii. 9, 10, 11. Jesus Christ is highly exalted of God, to the End, that at his Name every Knee shall bow, and every Tongue confess that he is the Lord, to the Glory of God the Father. That

1 Cor. xv. 25. he must Reign till he hath put all Enemies under his Feet. That He is with us alway, Mat. xxviii. 20. even unto the End of the World. And that, The Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of Truth, is so far from being de-

Mat. xvi. 18. stroy'd by human Means, that the gates of Hell (all the infernal Powers) shall not prevail against it. Let us therefore banish all such Conceits as may seem to justify our Indolence, as may reason us out of all courage and vigour in the Race that is set before

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us; let us not, I say, slacken our own Hands, nor enfeeble our own Knees, by preconceived Fancies and Suppositions, considering that as the Success of all Enterprises in great Measure depends on the Spirit of the Undertakers, so nothing is more apt to raise a Spirit than Hope; or to depress it, than Despondency. We ought therefore to shake off every vain Fear in our spiritual Warfare. The Number, the Presumption, and the Abilities of those, who take Counsel together against the Lord, and against his Anointed, should not dishearten, but rather excite and encourage us to stand in the Gap.

ANOTHER Consideration, that may possibly withhold divers sincere Believers from contributing their Endeavours for bringing Men to the Knowledge of God and Christ, and thereby to eternal Life, is the want of Miracles in the present Age. Men naturally cast about for Reasons to countenance the Part they take. And as the Gift of Miracles was of mighty Influence and Help to those, who were commissioned to spread abroad the Light of the Gospel in its first promulgation, so no Pretence offers it self more naturally to excuse a Man from executing any purpose, than the want of Authority, which, in the Opinion of
Men,

Men, cannot be without a just Commis-
sion, nor this unless distinguished by those
proper Means and Powers that have been
known to attend it. Now, with regard to
this defect of Miracles, I shall beg leave to
make two Observations.

First, It is to be observed, that if we have
not Miracles, we have other Advantages
which make them less necessary now, than
in the first spreading of the Gospel : Whole
Nations have found the Benefit of Christ's
Religion, it is protected by Princes, esta-
blished and encouraged by Laws, supported
by Learning and Arts, recommended by
the Experience of many Ages, as well as
by the Authority and Example of the wi-
sest and most knowing Men. Certainly,
if the greater Part of Mankind are Gen-
tiles or Mahometans, it cannot be denied
that the most knowing, most learned, and
most improved Nations, profess Christia-
nity, and that even the Mahometans them-
selves bear Testimony to the Divine Mis-
sion of Jesus Christ. Whereas therefore,
in the Beginning, a few illiterate Wan-
derers, of the meanest of the People, had
the Prejudices, the Learning, and the Pow-
er of their own, as well as other Nations,
in one Word, the whole World, to oppose
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and overcome: Those who at this Day engage in the Propagation of the Gospel, do it upon Terms in many Respects far more easy and advantageous. It is Power against Weakness, Civility against Barbarism, Knowledge against Ignorance, some or other, if not all these Advantages, in the present Times, attending the Progress of the Christian Religion, in whatever Part of the World Men shall attempt to plant it.

IN the second Place we may reflect, that if we have not the Gift of Miracles, this is a good Reason why we should exert more strongly those human Means which God hath put in our Power; and make our ordinary Faculties, whether of the Head, or the Hand, or the Tongue, our Interest, our Credit, or our Fortune, subservient to the great Giver of them; and cheerfully contribute our humble Mite towards hastening that Time, wherein *all Nations whom thou hast made, shall come and worship before thee, O Lord, and shall glorify thy Name.* It is at least a plain Case, that the Want of Apostolical Gifts should not be pleaded as a Bar to our doing that, which in no Respect, either of Difficulty or Danger, equals, or approaches the Apostolical Office. What
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Psalms
lxxxvi. 9.

Pretence can this supply for Mens being quite unconcerned about the spreading of the Gospel, or the Salvation of Souls? for Mens forgetting that they are Christians, and related to human Kind? How can this justify their overlooking Opportunities which lie in their Way, their not contributing a small Part of their Fortune towards forwarding a Design, wherein they share neither Pains nor Peril; the not bestowing on it, even the cheap Assistance of their Speech, Attention, Counsel, or Countenance, as Occasion offers? How unlike is this worldly, selfish Indifference, to that Account which St. Paul gives of himself, that *he sought not his own Profit, but the Profit of many, that they may be saved.* And yet herein he expected the *Corinthians* (and the same Reason will hold for us) should be like him; for he subjoins, *Be ye Followers of me as I also am of Christ.*

1 Cor. x.
33.

HAVING considered the Duty in general, I come now to treat of it with Reference to *America*, the peculiar Province of this Venerable Society; which I suppose well informed of the State and Progress of Religion in that part of the World, by their Correspondencies with the Clergy upon their Mission. It may nevertheless
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be expected that one who had been engaged in a Design in this very View, who hath been upon the Place, and resided a considerable Time in one of our Colonies, should have observed somewhat worth reporting. It is to be hoped, therefore, that one Part of my Audience will pardon, what the other may, perhaps, expect, while I detain them with the Narrative of a few Things I have observed, and such Reflections as thereupon suggested themselves; some part of which may possibly be found to extend to other Colonies.

Rhode-Island, with a Portion of the adjacent Continent, under the same Government, is inhabited by an *English* Colony, consisting chiefly of Sectaries of many different Denominations, who seem to have worn off part of that Prejudice, which they inherited from their Ancestors, against the National Church of this Land; though it must be acknowledged at the same Time, that too many of them have worn off a serious Sense of all Religion. Several indeed of the better Sort are accustomed to assemble themselves regularly on the Lord's Day for the Performance of Divine Worship. But most of those, who are dispersed throughout

throughout this Colony, seem to rival some well-bred People of other Countries, in a thorough Indifference for all that is sacred, being equally careless of outward Worship, and of inward Principles, whether of Faith or Practice. Of the Bulk of them it may certainly be said, that they live without the Sacraments, not being so much as baptized: And as for their Morals, I apprehend there is nothing to be found in them that should tempt others to make an Experiment of their Principles, either in Religion or Government. But it must be owned, the general Behaviour of the Inhabitants in those Towns where Churches and Meetings have been long settled, and regularly attended, seems so much better, as sufficiently to shew the Difference, which a solemn regular Worship of God makes between Persons of the same Blood, Temper, and natural Faculties.

THE native Indians, who are said to have been formerly many Thousands, within the compass of this Colony, do not at present amount to one Thousand, including every Age and Sex. And these are all either Servants or Labourers for the English, who have contributed more to destroy their Bodies by the Use of strong
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Liquors, than by any Means to improve their Minds, or save their Souls. This slow Poison, jointly operating with the Small-Pox, and their Wars (but much more destructive than both) hath consumed the Indians, not only in our Colonies, but also far and wide upon our Confines. And having made Havock of them, is now doing the same Thing by those who taught them that odious Vice.

THE Negroes in the Government of *Rhode-Island* are about half as many more than the Indians; and both together scarce amount to a seventh Part of the whole Colony. The Religion of these People, as is natural to suppose, takes after that of their Masters. Some few are baptized; several frequent the different Assemblies: and far the greater Part none at all. An antient Antipathy to the Indians, whom, it seems, our first Planters (therein as in certain other Particulars affecting to imitate Jews rather than Christians) imagined they had a Right to treat on the Foot of *Canaanites* or *Amalekites*, together with an irrational Contempt of the Blacks, as Creatures of another Species, who had no Right to be instructed or admitted to the Sacraments, have proved a

main Obstacle to the Conversion of these poor People.

To this may be added, an erroneous Notion, that the being baptized, is inconsistent with a State of Slavery. To undeceive them in this Particular, which had too much Weight, it seemed a proper Step, if the Opinion of his Majesty's Attorney and Solicitor-General could be procured. This Opinion they charitably sent over, signed with their own Hands; which was accordingly printed in *Rhode-Island*, and dispersed throughout the Plantations. I heartily wish it may produce the intended Effect. It must be owned, our reformed Planters, with respect to the Natives and the Slaves, might learn from those of the Church of *Rome*, how it is their Interest and Duty to behave. Both *French* and *Spaniards* have intermarried with *Indians*, to the great Strength, Security and Increase of their Colonies. They take Care to instruct both them and their Negroes, in the *Popish* Religion, to the Reproach of those who profess a better. They have also Bishops and Seminaries for Clergy; and it is not found that their Colonies are worse Subjects, or depend less on their Mother Country, on that Account.

It should seem, that the likeliest Step towards converting the Heathen, would be to begin with the *English* Planters; whose Influence will for ever be an Obstacle to propagating the Gospel, till they have a right Sense of it themselves, which would shew them how much it is their Duty to impart it to others. The Missionaries employed by this Venerable Society have done, and continue to do, good Service, in bringing those Planters to a serious Sense of Religion, which, it is hoped, will in time extend to others. I speak it knowingly, that the Ministers of the Gospel, in those Provinces which go by the Name of *New-England*, sent and supported at the Expence of this Society, have, by their Sobriety of Manners, discreet Behaviour, and a competent Degree of useful Knowledge, shewn themselves worthy the Choice of those who sent them; and particularly in living on a more friendly Foot with their Brethren of the Separation; who, on their Part, are also very much come off from that Narrowness of Spirit, which formerly kept them at such an unamicable Distance from us. And as there is reason to apprehend, that Part of *America* could not have been thus distinguished, and provided with such a

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Number of proper Persons, if one half of them had not been supplied out of the dissenting Seminaries of the Country, who, in Proportion as they attain to more liberal Improvements of Learning, are observed to quit their Prejudice towards an Episcopal Church; so I verily think it might increase the Number of such useful Men, if Provision were made to defray their Charges in coming hither to receive holy Orders; passing and repassing the Ocean, and tarrying the necessary Time in *London*, requiring an Expence that many are not able to bear. It would also be an Encouragement to the Missionaries in general, and probably produce good Effects, if the Allowance of certain Missionaries were augmented, in proportion to the Service they had done, and the Time they had spent in their Mission. These Hints I venture to suggest, as not unuseful in an Age, wherein all humane Encouragements are found more necessary, than at the first Propagation of the Gospel. But they are, with all due Deference and Respect, submitted to the Judgment of this Venerable Audience.

AFTER all, it is hardly to be expected, that so long as Infidelity prevails at home, the Christian Religion should thrive and flourish

flourish in our Colonies abroad. Mankind, it must be owned, left to themselves, are so much bewildered and benighted, with respect to the Origin of that Evil which they feel, and from which they are at a Loss about the Means of being freed; that the Doctrines of the lapsed State of Man, his Reconciliation by Christ, and Regeneration by the Spirit, may reasonably be hoped to find an easy Admission, as bringing with them Light and Comfort, into a Mind not hardened by Impenitency, nor fore-closed by Pride, nor bias'd by Prejudice. But, such is the Vanity of Man, that no Prejudice operates more powerfully than that in Favour of Fashion; and no Fashions are so much followed by our Colonies, as those of the Mother Country, which they often adopt in their Modes of living, to their great Inconvenience, without allowing for the Disparity of Circumstance or Climate. This same Humour hath made Infidelity (as I find it too credibly reported) spread in some of our wealthy Plantations; uneducated Men being more apt to tread in the Steps of Libertines and Men of Fashion, than to model themselves by the Laws and Institutions of their Mother Country,

Country, or the Lives and Professions of the virtuous and religious Part of it.

BUT this is not all; While those abroad are less disposed to receive, some at home are, perhaps, less disposed to propagate the Gospel, from the same Cause. It is to be feared, I say, that the prevailing Torrent of Infidelity, which staggers the Faith of some, may cool the Zeal, and damp the Spirit of others, who, judging from the Event and Success of those, who impugn the Church of Christ, may possibly entertain some Scruple or Surmise, whether it may not be, for the present at least, abandoned by Providence, and that human Care must ineffectually interpose, till it shall please God, *yet once more to shake not the Earth only, but also the Heavens.* This Point hath been touched before, but deserves farther Consideration: to the end, that the peculiar Impiety of a profane Age, may not be a Bar to those very Endeavours, which it self renders more necessary, and calls for more loudly now than ever.

WHATEVER Men may think, the Arm of the Lord is not shorten'd. In all this Prevalency of Atheism and Irreligion, there is no Advantage gained by the Powers of Darkness, either against God, or godly Men,
but

but only against their own wretched Partisans. The Christian Dispensation is a Dispensation of Grace and Favour. The Christian Church a Society of Men intitled to this Grace, on performing certain Conditions. If this Society is diminished, as those who remain true Members of it suffer no Loss to themselves, so God loseth no Right, suffereth no Detriment, foregoeth no Good ; his Grace resisted or unfruitful, being no more lost to him, than the Light of the Sun shining on desert Places, or among People who shut their Eyes.

BESIDES, this Excess, this unstemmed Torrent of Profaneness, may possibly, in the Conclusion, defeat itself, confirm what it meant to extirpate, and instead of destroying, prove a Means of preserving our Religion ; the evil Fruits and Effects thereof being so notorious and flagrant, and so sensibly felt, as in all likelihood to be able to open the Eyes, and rouse the Attention of those, who may be blind and deaf to every other Argument and Consideration. Or, who knows but the Christian Church corrupted by Prosperity, is to be restored and purified by Adversity ? which may prove, for ought we can tell, as salutary in future, as it hath been in past Ages. Many insolent and pre-

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sumptuous Foes have set themselves against the Church of God; whose Hook nevertheless may be in their Nostrils, and his Bridle in their Lips, managing and governing, even their Rage and Folly, to the fulfilling of his own wise Purposes; and who may not fail in the End, to deal by them as he did by the King of *Affyria*, when he had performed his *Work upon Sin and upon Jerusalem, punishing their stout Heart and high Looks*. This presumptuous Conqueror was, without knowing it, a Tool or Instrument in the Hands of that God whom he blasphemed.

Isa. x. 5, 6, 7. *O Affyrian, the Rod of mine Anger! I will send him against an hypocritical Nation, and against the People of my Wrath will I give him a Charge to take the Spoil, and to take the Prey, and to tread them down like the Mire of the Streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his Heart think so, but it is in his Heart to destroy and cut off Nations not a few.*

THUS much at least is evident: It is no new Thing, that great Enormities should produce great Humiliations, and these again noble Vertues, which have often recovered both single Men, and whole States, even in a natural and civil Sense. And if the Captivities, Distresses, and Desolations of the Jewish

ish Church, have occasioned their Return to God, and reinstated them in his Favour ; nay, if it was actually foretold, whenever they lay under the Curse of God, at the Mercy of their Enemies, peeled and scattered in a foreign Land, that nevertheless upon their calling his Covenant to Mind, and returning to him, *the Lord their God* Deut. xxx. 3. *would turn their Captivity, and have Compassion upon them.* I say, if Things were so, why may we not in Reason hope for something analogous thereto, in behalf of the Christian Church. It cannot be denied, that there was a great Analogy between the Jewish Institutions, and the Doctrines of the Gospel ; for instance, between the Paschal Lamb, and the Lamb of God slain from the Foundation of the World ; between the *Egyptian* Bondage, and that of Sin ; the earthly *Canaan*, and the heavenly ; the fleshly Circumcision, and the spiritual. In these and many other Particulars, the Analogy seems so plain, that it can hardly be disputed. To be convinced that the Law of *Moses*, and the Jewish Oeconomy were Figures and Shadows of the Evangelical, we need only look into the Epistle to the *Hebrews*. May we not therefore, in pursuance of this same A-

analogy, suppose a similar Treatment of the Jewish and Christian Church?

LET us then see, on what Terms the former stood with God, in order to discover what the latter may reasonably expect. The solemn Denunciation to the Jews was, *If thou shalt kearken diligently to the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his Commandments, which I command thee this Day, the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all the Nations of the Earth.* But in case of Disobedience, it is added among many other Threats and Maledictions: *The Lord shall smite thee with Blasting and with Mildew: and the Heaven that is over thy Head shall be Brass, and the Earth that is under thy Feet shall be Iron.* And again, *The Lord shall smite thee with Madness, and Blindness, and Astonishment of Heart.* Have not the People of this Land drawn down upon it, by more Ways than one, the just Judgments of Heaven? Surely we have felt in a Metaphor the first of the forementioned Judgments; and the last hath been literally fulfilled upon us. Is it not visible that we are less knowing, less vertuous, less reasonable, in proportion as we are less religious? Are we not grown drunk and giddy with Vice and Vanity and Presumption, and Free-thinking, and

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Extravagance of every kind? to a Degree that we may truly be said to be *smitten with Madness, and Blindness, and Astonishment of Heart.*

As antiently most unchristian Schisms and Disputes, joined with great Corruption of Manners, made way for the Mahometan in the East, and the Papal Dominion in the West; even so here at home in the last Century, a weak Reliance upon human Politics and Power on the one hand, and enthusiastic Rage on the other, together with carnal Mindedness on both, gave occasion to introduce Atheism and Infidelity. If the temporal State, and outward Form of the Jewish Church was, upon their Defection, overturned by Invaders, in like manner, when Christians are no longer governed by the Light of Evangelical Truth, when we resist the Spirit of God, are we not to expect, that *the Heaven above will be as Brass*, that the Divine Grace will no longer shower down on our obdurate Hearts, that our Church and Profession will be blasted by licentious Scorners, those Madmen, who in Sport *scatter Firebrands, Arrows and Death*? As all this is no more than we may reasonably suppose will ensue upon our Backsliding, so we
may,

may, with equal Reason, hope it will be remedied upon our Return to God.

FROM what hath been said it follows, that in order to propagate the Gospel abroad, it is necessary we do it at home, and extend our Charity to domestic Infidels, if we would convert or prevent foreign ones. So that a View of the declining State of Religion here at home, of those things that produced this Declension, and of the proper Methods to repair it, is naturally connected with the Subject of this Discourse. I shall therefore beg your Patience, while I just mention a few Remarks or Hints, too obvious, perhaps, in themselves to be new or unknown to any present, but too little visible in their Effects, to make one think they are, by all, much attended to.

SOME, preferring Points notional or ritual to the Love of God and Man, consider the National Church only as it stands opposed to other Christian Societies. These generally have a Zeal without Knowledge, and the Effects are suitable to the Cause; they really hurt what they seem to espouse. Others more solicitous about the Discovery of Truth, than the Practice of Holiness, employ themselves, rather to spy out Errors in the Church, than enforce its Precepts.

cepts. These, it is to be feared, postpone the great Interests of Religion to Points of less Concern, in any Eyes but their own. But surely they would do well to consider, that an humble, though confused or indistinct, Faith in the Bond of Charity, and productive of good Works, is much more Evangelical than an accurate disputing and conceited Knowledge.

A Church which contains the Fundamentals, and nothing subversive of those Fundamentals, is not to be set at naught by any particular Member; because it may not, in every Point, perhaps, correspond with his Ideas, no not, though he is sure of being in the right. Probably there never was, or will be, an established Church in this World, without visible Marks of Humanity upon it. Saint *Paul* supposeth, that *on the Foundation of Jesus Christ, there will be human Superstructures of Hay and Stubble*, things light and trivial, wrong or superstitious, which indeed is a natural Consequence of the Weakness and Ignorance of Man. But where that living Foundation is rightly laid in the Mind, there will not fail to grow and spring from thence those Vertues and Graces, which are the genuine Effects and Tokens of true Faith, and which are by no means

1 Cor. iii.
12.

means inconsistent with every Error in Theory, or every needless Rite in Worship.

THE Christian Religion was calculated for the Bulk of Mankind, and therefore cannot reasonably be supposed to consist in subtle and nice Notions. From the time that Divinity was considered as a Science, and human Reason enthroned in the Sanctuary of God, the Hearts of its Professors seem to have been less under the Influence of Grace. From that time have grown many unchristian Dissentions and Controversies,

1 Tim. vi. 4. of Men knowing nothing, but doating about Questions and Strife of Words, whereof cometh Envy, Strife, Railings, evil Surmises, perverse Disputings of Men of corrupt Minds, and destitute of Truth. Doubtless, the making Religion a notional Thing, hath been of infinite Disservice. And whereas its holy Mysteries are rather to be received with Humility of Faith, than defined and measured by the accuracy of human Reason; all Attempts of this kind, however well intended, have visibly failed in the Event; and instead of reconciling Infidels, have, by creating Disputes and Heats among the Professors of Christianity, given no small Advantage to its Enemies.

To

To conclude, if we proportioned our Zeal to the Importance of Things : If we could love Men whose Opinions we do not approve : If we knew the World more, and liked it less : If we had a due Sense of the Divine Perfection and our own Defects : If our chief Study was the Wisdom from above, described by St. Paul : And if, in order to all this, that were done in Places of Education, which cannot so well be done out of them : I say, if these Steps were taken at home, while proper Measures are carrying on abroad, the one would very much forward or facilitate the other. As it is not meant, so it must not be understood, that foreign Attempts should wait for domestic Success, but only that it is to be wished they may co-operate. Certainly if a just and rational, a genuine and sincere, a warm and vigorous Piety, animated the Mother-Country, the Influence thereof would soon reach our Foreign Plantations, and extend throughout their Borders. We should soon see Religion shine forth with new Lustre and Force, to the Conversion of Infidels, both at home and abroad, and to *the casting* ^{2 Cor. x.}
down high Imaginations, and every Thing ^{s.}
E that

that exalteth it self against the Knowledge of God, and bringing into Captivity every Thought to the Obedience of Christ.

To whom with the FATHER, and the HOLY GHOST, be ascribed all Praise, Might, Majesty, and Dominion, now and for ever.

F I N I S.



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